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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

LONDON FOR GURNEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BOOK LAUNCH FOR BABANGIDA'S PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

REF: LAGOS 1823

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, NOT FOR PUBLICATION ON THE INTRANET OR INTERNET

¶1. (SBU) CDA was invited to an August 27 event "launching a book by ex-Minister of the Interior John Shagaya." There was a book, but the affair was clearly more intended to help launch the candidacy of former President Babangida in 2007.

¶2. (SBU) 2003 and potential 2007 candidate Mohammedu Buhari, who attended the event, clearly saw it that way too. Several luminaries among the hundreds who attended were invited to come to the microphone in this rally. Buhari went up and said in a challenging tone "This was to be a book launch, but it looks as if we are launching a man (Babangida) instead. Many of Buhari's remarks seemed to suggest he would be Babangida's opponent in 2007, and despite the nature of the event there was considerable applause for his bellicosity.

¶3. (SBU) Several others who went to the microphones made announcement such as buying 5 books for 5 million Naira (USDOLS 7,690), and there were periodic announcements, as at a telethon, of others buying numbers of books for inflated prices. There was a clear implication that much of the proceeds would be used in Babangida's campaign. The book itself reads rather like a campaign biography for Babangida. Other than a perfunctory thanks to the author at the beginning, Babangida in his own remarks did not address the book itself but rather gave a campaign address. The three planks of his campaign were:

-- Expand democracy;
-- Build infrastructure for economic development; and
-- Create economic opportunity for the young and unemployed.

¶4. (SBU) The affair was also interesting for the number of Obasanjo administration figures present, including present Interior Minister Iyorchia Ayu. (Comment: As noted reftel, Babangida's "exploratory campaign" cuts across existing party lines. That might be expected, given the loose nature of Nigeria's political parties and Obasanjo's constitutional lame-duck status beginning his second term, but many politicians simply want to stay on good terms with all the potential 2007 candidates.)
ROBERTS